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THE
BANQUET OF LOVE

BY THE
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AUTHOR OF "WHY DELAY?" "THE SAVIOUR
WE NEED," ETC.

"He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner
over me was love."—SONG OF SOLOMON ii. 4

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PREFACE.

I HAVE endeavored in this small volume to combine devotion with instruction. The communicant needs not only to have his mind enlightened, but also to have his heart moved. The Lord's Supper is a most impressive appeal to the tenderest sensibilities of our nature; and if there be any time when our affections should be in lively exercise, it is when we have before us the love-memorials of our bleeding, dying Lord. May I not also hope that my brethren in the ministry will here find sugges-

tions serviceable to them in the administration of the communion?

But, whatever benefit others may derive from the work, I may be allowed to say that its preparation has been to me a source of great enjoyment during several winter months, when, in consequence of physical infirmities, I have been laid aside from public duties.

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THE
BANQUET OF LOVE.

I.

THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE LOVE OF CHRIST.

IT was the prayer of Paul for the Ephesian church that, "being rooted and grounded in love, they might be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." This language is certainly remarkable, and seemingly paradoxical. The apostle speaks of comprehending what is incomprehensible—of knowing what surpasses knowledge. And yet it is just such language as this devoted servant of

God was accustomed to use. So entirely absorbed was he with the great truths of the gospel that ordinary language failed to express the deep convictions and emotions of his spirit.

There is a sense in which the love of Christ is incomprehensible. Never can we fully estimate the immensity of that love. We can neither scale its height nor sound its depth nor measure its length and its breadth. We have no line by which we can determine its dimensions. We know of no love that can be compared with it. A mother's love to her offspring, a patriot's love to his country, and even a Christian's love to his Saviour,—all sink into insignificance here.

“Angels, assist our mighty joys;
Strike all your harps of gold;
But when ye raise your highest notes,
His love can ne'er be told.”

Contemplate the *breadth* of this love. How far does it extend? Just as far as the ravages of sin can be found, even to every son and daughter of Adam, irrespective of rank, complexion or nation.

See also the *length* of this love. As it is without beginning, so it is without end—"from everlasting to everlasting." "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee."

Then the *depth* of this love. From what an abyss of woe does it rescue us—from an eternal sinning and eternal suffering!

The *height*, also, of this love. To what a height of honor does it exalt us!—we are made "kings and priests unto God." To what a height of felicity!—"fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore." To what a height of security!—we "receive a kingdom that cannot be moved." All

the divine perfections are infinite. The power of God is unlimited, his wisdom unsearchable, his love a vast ocean without bottom or shore.

Boundless, ineffable love! How vain the attempt to describe what exceeds all human conception! Language fails us. Neither men nor angels can do justice to the stupendous theme.

Truly to know this love, it must be known experimentally. It must be revealed not only to us, but *in* us, "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost," whose province it is to take of the things of Jesus and show them unto us. The natural man can have no just apprehension of the love of Christ. He may read of this love, he may hear of this love, he may speak of this love, he may sing of this love; but never will he truly know it until he feels it. O Thou who didst "command

the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!"

To all who believe, Christ is precious; but how low are their highest conceptions of his glory! and what room is there for perpetual progress in knowledge as well as in grace! Let us "follow on to know the Lord," until we behold him face to face and rejoice for ever in the manifestations of his love. The vast profound of the Redeemer's love can never be fathomed. We shall need a whole eternity to reveal the mystery. For centuries have angels been "looking into these things;" but the longer they search, the greater is their wonder. Paul, after he had known Christ and preached Christ for many years, speaks as though the knowledge was yet to be attained: "That I may

know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death." He counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

Let us study with more devout interest the character of Christ as revealed in his word; and, though we may never be able fully to comprehend the immensity of his love, let us at least strive to have our conception of it continually enlarged. Think of the unworthiness of the objects of that love: "What is man, O Lord, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?" Think of the sacrifices which that love has made: "Ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." Think

of the inestimable blessings which that love confers—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Think of the constancy of that love: “Having loved his own, he loves them unto the end.” “Jesus Christ was an incarnation of love in our world. He was love living, breathing, speaking, acting, amongst men. His birth was the nativity of love; his sermons, the words of love; his miracles, the wonders of love; his tears, the meltings of love; his crucifixion, the agonies of love; his resurrection, the triumphs of love.”

Who that has any just estimate of the character and the work of the Redeemer can fail to be filled with adoring wonder, and to wish that he had ten thousand tongues with which to speak his praise? It is recorded of one of the most distinguished theologians and authors of our country that

he would at times become so absorbed in the stupendous theme that, leaving his study, "he would walk his parlor-floor for two or three hours, pressing his hands together in the most ravishing delight, and seemingly in such ecstasy as to be unable to contain himself." Was this enthusiasm? Just such as thrills the bosoms of the ransomed around the throne, whose bursting songs of praise reverberate like the voice of many thunders throughout the celestial domains.

The late Dr. James C. Bliss, a prominent physician in New York, was as distinguished for his ardent piety as for his medical skill. It is to his kind attention, under God, that the writer more than once owed his recovery from severe illness. When Dr. Bliss was near his end, and was scarcely able to speak a single word, the last utterances

that dropped from his feeble lips were :
“ Precious Saviour ! Precious Lamb of
God ! ” Then his ransomed spirit took
its flight into the bosom of that Saviour
who had for many years been all his
salvation and all his desire. And how
many dying saints have borne a similar
testimony to their unabating love to their
adorable Redeemer, waiting with joyful
expectation the time when they shall see
him face to face and what they now know
only in part shall be fully revealed !

II.

“WE WILL REMEMBER THY LOVE.”

THE love which the Church here resolves to commemorate is the love of Christ—a love so vast, so amazing, so divine, that it may well call forth the hallelujahs of heaven and of earth. No one has ever endured for us what was endured by the Man of sorrows, and to no one are we under such high and sacred obligations. We admire the self-denial of John Howard, who in the cause of humanity not only spent his property, but eventually sacrificed his life. Leaving his comfortable home, he went forth on his mission of mercy, plunging into jails and dungeons and exposing himself to infection that he

might ameliorate the condition of the wretched prisoner. His devotion to the interest of those whom he sought to benefit has justly secured for him the honorable title of "Philanthropist," and his name will no doubt remain recorded on the book of fame down to the end of time. But now think of Jesus leaving heaven itself and submitting to untold sufferings for his bitterest foes. To set us free, he assumed our chains; to redeem us from the curse, he became a curse; to give us life, he delivered himself up to death. "Christ," says the apostle, "loved me and gave himself for me." *Gave himself!* What more could he have given? Gave himself to poverty, to reproach, to days of weariness and nights of watching and prayer, to the torture of crucifixion, and to anguish of spirit unutterable and inconceivable.

Who can forget such a Benefactor, such a Saviour? Do we forget our friends? Separated as we may be from them by continents and by oceans, how gratefully do we still cherish the remembrance of their former kindness! Death itself cools not the ardor of our affection. Absent from them in body, we are still present with them in spirit. The image of their persons is still before us, and the love which they once evinced toward us is written on our hearts in characters that can never be erased. Whatever else a redeemed sinner may forget, never can he forget the Saviour who bought him with his blood. The recollection of the past may fade, the names of his dearest earthly friends may be forgotten; but not so with the Object of his supreme love and confidence. The name of Jesus will ever sound sweetly in his ear

and awaken within him the tenderest emotions. Engraved on the tablet of his heart as with the point of a diamond, memory must be utterly annihilated ere the record will cease to be read. The writer once visited a minister of Christ who was in the hundredth year of his age. The events of the past, except those that had occurred in his early days, were almost entirely obliterated from his memory, and even the names of his most familiar friends were forgotten. "There is one name," I said to him, "you can never forget—the name of Jesus." After a short pause, "Oh no," exclaimed the aged saint; "he is my Saviour, and I expect soon to be with him in glory."

It is related of Dr. Isaac Watts that while seated under a tree in one corner of the garden where he wrote many of his excellent hymns, absorbed in the

wonders of redemption, he gave expression to his feelings by inscribing with his penknife on the smooth bark of the tree a cross. He then composed one of his most beautiful lyrics, two stanzas of which are as follows :

“ I'd carve thy passion on the bark,
And every wounded tree
Shall droop and bear some mystic mark
That Jesus died for me.

“ The swains shall wonder when they read
Inscribed on all the grove
That Heaven itself came down and bled
To win a mortal's love.”

This may seem unduly sentimental, but how tenderly expressive is it of the believer's ardent attachment to his Saviour and his earnest desire that he may be known and adored by all !

Precious Saviour ! forgive me that I do not dwell with more constancy and

delight on thy love. Thou didst think of me long before I thought of thee. Thou didst remember me in my low estate and bare thy bosom to the sword of justice that must have fallen upon me. Thou didst seek me when wandering upon the dark mountains of sin and bring me into thy fold. Thou didst speak to me when burdened with guilt the words of pardon and of peace. Covered with defilement, thou didst wash me in thine all-cleansing blood. How, then, can I ungratefully forget my kindest and my best Friend? Sooner let my right hand forget its cunning, my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth and my heart for ever cease its beating.

“The nails, the spear, can we forget,
The agonizing cry?
My God, my Father, wilt thou let
Thy Son, forsaken, die?”

Life's brightest joys we may forget,
Our kindred cease to love;
But He who paid our hopeless debt
Our constancy shall prove."

In a cemetery in the West there is said to be on a grave a plain wooden tablet bearing this inscription: "He died for me." It was placed there by a poor man in grateful remembrance of one who in our late war freely gave himself as a substitute for his friend and had sacrificed his life for him. What returns, then, should we render to the Saviour who purchased our redemption at the price of his most precious blood—to whose voluntary sacrifice we are indebted for all the blessings we enjoy in this world and all we hope for in the next?

III.

THE MEMORIAL.

It is both the duty and the happiness of the believer to bear in constant remembrance the love of the Redeemer, thus "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus." But this habitual remembrance by no means supersedes the propriety and the necessity of a more formal and more stated commemoration. He who knows what man is and what man needs has in his unbounded wisdom and benevolence instituted an ordinance in which he is "evidently set before us crucified," and in the celebration of which we may testify our love to him and honor him before the world. "Do this in remem-

brance of me." The command is explicit and peremptory; and it is ours, not to object, but to obey. He certainly has a right to say how he shall be remembered, and in making this demand he has surely imposed upon us no intolerable burden.

Superstition has so perverted the ordinance as to ascribe to it a virtue it does not possess and a design its divine Founder never contemplated. Like all the institutions of the gospel, it is remarkable for its simplicity. Here is no splendid ritual, no pompous display, no transfer of the elements into another substance, but simply bread and wine, the breaking of the bread significant of the broken or crucified body of the Saviour, and the pouring out of the wine, of the effusion of his precious blood, thus symbolically representing to our senses and to our minds the

tragic scene of the cross and assuring us of the great fact that there is salvation in Christ, and in him alone. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."

The ordinance invests the death of the Redeemer with peculiar significance and importance. We have no divinely-appointed institution to commemorate the birth of Christ or any of the remarkable transactions of his life; but his death, constituting, as it did, the great event upon which was suspended the world's redemption, should ever be the special object of our contemplation. But for that death not a soul could have been saved. All the happiness we enjoy on earth, and all we hope to enjoy in heaven, flows to us from the atoning sacrifice of the cross. There is therefore the strongest reason why that sac-

rifice should be kept continually in view, not only in the preaching of the gospel, but also in the ordinance of the Supper.

The perpetual celebration of this ordinance from the days of the apostles down to the present age furnishes a standing memorial of the Saviour's death and a most striking demonstration of the divinity of his religion. As the passover of the Jews perpetuated the memory of the merciful deliverance of the nation on the night of the slaying of the first-born of the Egyptians, so does the Lord's Supper, which has succeeded it, perpetuate the one meritorious offering for man's redemption.

It was not so much on his own account as on ours that Jesus instituted this memorial. We may indeed suppose it to have been his desire that his self-sacrificing love should be gratefully remembered, but it is especially to benefit us

that he has appointed this memorial. Well does he know our proneness to forget him, and in condescension to our weakness and waywardness he has given us this visible representation of his death, thus through the medium of our senses appealing to our tenderest emotions, confirming our faith and sealing to us the inestimable benefits of his redemption.

We have no authentic portrait of Christ's person, and it is well that it is so; for the tendency to image-worship would no doubt lead multitudes to render that homage to the work of the artist which belongs alone to the divine Original. We have, however, a *moral* portrait of the Redeemer drawn by the pen of inspiration from his immaculate life, and represented in the symbols of the holy communion. These symbols are not, as some suppose, Christ himself,

but exhibit to us his dying agony and his matchless love in a way calculated to call forth our most devout affections.

A mother as she approaches her end, taking the ring from her finger, presents it to her child: "Preserve this, my child, as a keepsake, and as often as you look at it remember your mother." What a precious memento would that be, and how reluctantly would it be parted with! So Jesus, before he expired on the cross, as a token of his tender regard to his Church takes the sacred emblems and, delivering them to us, says, "Look upon these, and remember me."

With what ardent love as well as with what deep humiliation should we receive the emblems of our dying Lord! From the sign let our attention be directed to the thing signified, from things external

to the invisible realities which they represent :

“ I eat the bread, I drink the wine ;
But, oh, my soul wants more than sign.”

Everything depends upon the manner in which this ordinance is celebrated. It possesses no inherent efficacy, no magic power to take away sin. Only to the true believer who spiritually discerns the Lord's body does it prove a blessing.

IV.

“LOVEST THOU ME?”

THIS question is as certainly addressed to us as it was addressed to Peter. It is a personal question, and as such demands an answer of us as individuals. Happy they who, in the language of the apostle, can appeal to the omniscient Saviour: “Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee.”

There ought to be no occasion for this question. The evidence of our love to Christ should be so unequivocal as to be questioned neither by him nor by ourselves. He has made us capable of love; and if we can love any being, it might be supposed that we must love the One “altogether lovely.” Who

possesses such charms as he? Who has done for us what he has done? Who can do for us what he has engaged to do? Love Jesus? how can I help loving Him who first loved me? Love infinite excellence? love the name which is above every name in heaven and on earth? "O my God," writes a pious lady, "if I cease to love and praise thee, let me cease to breathe and live."

The question "Lovest thou me?" is one which we should all be prepared to answer promptly and affirmatively. Why should we not be as conscious of love to Christ as we are of our love to any other being? Do we question our love to kindred and to friends? Does the mother question her love to her offspring? Does the avaricious man question his love to his treasures? Does the voluptuous man question his love of his pleasures? Do the gay and giddy

throng question their love of their fashionable follies? And yet how many professed Christians are ever questioning their love to Christ! Let every allowance be made for the tempted and the tried believer. Physical causes may sometimes darken his perceptions and render him almost incapable of determining his moral exercises. The fear of self-deception and a sense of his numerous shortcomings may lead him to overlook the clearest manifestations of attachment to the Saviour, and occasion distrust and despondency when the believer should go on his way rejoicing. Still, there is such an essential distinction between nature and grace, between love for Christ and disaffection toward him, that no one should be at a loss to determine the state of his heart in reference to the Redeemer.

The fact that the Being who here

claims our love is invisible to the eye of sense is certainly no reason why we should not love him and be conscious of our love. Is it necessary that those whom we love should be present with us? Do we not love our friends at a distance? Do we not love those whom we have never seen and with whose character we have become acquainted only by report? What though the Son of God no longer dwells on the earth and we are not privileged, as were the first disciples, to look upon him, to converse with him and to listen to the gracious words that fell from his lips? Have we not a faithful record of his life and of his death? and may not the contemplation of his moral excellence and his matchless kindness awaken within us the most grateful recollections? "Whom having not seen ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with

joy unspeakable and full of glory." We behold him not face to face, as do the blest spirits that dwell before his throne, nor adore him in the rapturous strains that burst from their immortal tongues; yet, even with the clouds that now veil him from our full vision, may he be the object equally of our warmest affection and of our loftiest praise.

"Though not with them, thy happier race, allowed
To view the bright unveiled divinity—
By no audacious glance from mortal eyes
These mystic glories are to be profaned—
But yet I feel the same immortal flame,
And love thee, though *unseen*."

But do we *really* love him? A mistake here would be sad indeed. "Grace," says the apostle, "be with all them that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity," implying that there is a love feigned and hypocritical; a love founded on false views of his character; a love merely

sentimental ; a love that dwells on the lip, but has no place in the heart. Love to Christ, like love to any other being, must have its appropriate manifestations and fruits. We delight to think and to speak of those whom we love ; we aim to please those whom we love, to defend their character and to promote their interests ; and why should not our love to the Saviour evince itself in the same way ? True love to him must lead us to dwell on his excellences, to speak of his worth, to defend him from the assaults of his foes, and earnestly to pray and labor for the promotion of the great cause for which he bled and died. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Here is a test at once plain and practical—hearty obedience to the commandments of Christ, a sincere desire and endeavor in all things to do his will.

There is one characteristic of this

love that must not be overlooked: it must be *supreme*. There are other objects which we are permitted to love, but they must all be loved in subordination to Christ and for his sake. He claims an undivided heart. He must be everything or nothing.

The solution of the question before us involves interests of the highest moment—our standing before God here and our eternal destiny hereafter. Love to Christ is the very essence of Christianity. Without it all our religion is but as “sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.” Heaven is the region of love; its wide domains echo with rapturous praise to the exalted Redeemer, and none but those whose hearts glow with devout affection to him can mingle their voices in the celestial strain.

Adorable Saviour! may I not humbly appeal to thee to attest the sincerity

of my love? If I love thee not, why this earnest longing for communion with thee and this uneasiness at even thy temporary absence? Why do I deprecate as the saddest of all calamities eternal banishment from thy face and look forward to the enjoyment of thy presence in heaven as the consummation of my bliss? Why do I find such pleasure in reading thy word, drawing nigh to thee in prayer and meditating on thy wondrous works? Art thou not "the spring of all my joys, the life of my delights"? What are all the honors, the emoluments, the fascinations, of earth compared with thee? With thee I have all things; without thee my spirit pines in anguish and existence itself becomes a burden. With deep humiliation do I confess that I do not love thee as I ought. My warmest affection is comparatively cold, and my

highest aspirations are feeble; yet, O thou Searcher of my heart! do not I esteem thee above all created glory and cleave to thee with a tenacity which neither life nor death can sunder?

“Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is weak and faint;
Yet I love thee, and adore:
Oh for grace to love thee more!”

V.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

SELF-EXAMINATION is a daily duty, but there are special reasons why it should be attended to in our approach to the Lord's Supper. The ordinance is one of peculiar solemnity and demands of us careful preparation. Without the proper qualifications it can be to us of no spiritual benefit.

In celebrating this ordinance the first question to be decided relates to *the possession of true piety*, a living faith in Christ as our Redeemer, rendering us partakers of the benefits purchased by his blood. The ordinance was instituted, not to make believers, but for those who have believed; not as a

means of grace in the same sense as the reading of the Scriptures and the preaching of the gospel, but to promote the spiritual edification of those who are already the subjects of renewing grace: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." No one can consistently profess love to Christ at his Table who does not possess love; profess faith in Christ who does not possess faith. Am I, then, what I profess to be—a disciple of Jesus, a child of God, an heir of glory? Have I seen and felt myself to be a ruined, helpless sinner? Have I confessed my guilt and ill-desert before God and supplicated his pardoning mercy? Have I renounced all dependence upon my own righteousness and committed my eternal interests into the hands of the great Mediator? Do I regard sin with ab-

horrence and desire nothing so much as to be delivered from it? Have I yielded up my idolatrous attachment to the world and chosen God as my eternal inheritance? Have I given myself to his service, making his word the rule of my conduct and his glory the great aim of my life? Do I study his word with a sincere desire to know his will and to walk in the way of his precepts? Do I seek God's help in daily prayer?

Momentous questions! Questions that should come home to every communicant with most solemn weight and call forth the deepest heart-searching! Let the examination be thorough and impartial. Let the Bible be the only standard, and the evidences of piety as there marked out the only test. Let me not be satisfied with the favorable judgment of man, but see that I am

approved of God: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

It may be that the reader is still in doubt as to his Christian character, and may ask, "What, in this state of mind, is my duty in regard to the Lord's Supper? Shall I venture to partake of the ordinance, or shall I not?" The question is a difficult one for the writer to answer. If your doubts result from the indulgence of known sin or from the willful neglect of known duty, the case is plain. The sin must be renounced, the duty must be performed, or you certainly will not be in a fit state to draw nigh to God. Resolve, then, at once to part with everything contrary to the will of God and make a full and hearty surrender of yourself to him. If

you have never yet made such a surrender, make it now—now, while you are poring over these pages and while yet the door of mercy remains open.

If your scruples, however, arise from a deep consciousness of your failings and unworthiness, whatever cause you may have for humiliation, there is no reason why you may not still be a welcome guest at the Table. Come with sincere sorrow for all your defects; come with sole dependence upon the merits of Jesus; come with the fixed purpose to renew your covenant engagements; come that your faith may be strengthened and confirmed; and He who invites you near will surely not cast you out. When the apostle Paul speaks of “eating and drinking unworthily,” it is not to discourage the truly penitent, but to guard the ordinance against abuse and profanation. Worthiness in the

sense of merit can be claimed by none. The most suitable qualification for the communion is a deep sense of unworthiness and a humble reliance on divine grace for acceptance.

But there is another matter for self-examination in approaching the communion-table: it relates to *our spiritual progress and to the present tone of our piety*. You may be a professed Christian, and yet be in a backslidden state. You may have left your first love and have lost in a great measure your former relish for divine things. You may have lived in a criminal conformity to the world and have wandered far from God and duty. While in this state of spiritual declension you can hardly feel prepared to hold fellowship with the Saviour at his Table. But why remain in this state? Why not at once return to your forsaken God and with the assist-

ance of his grace pledge yourself anew to live alone for him?

Every communicant should make careful inquiry as to his conduct since the last communion: "I then took upon me vows the most sacred and most binding. Have I fulfilled the engagement? Have I carried with me from day to day a sense of my infinite obligations to my dying Saviour and endeavored to live a humble, holy and exemplary life? Have I evinced my gratitude to him not only by obedience to his precepts, but by my earnest and prayerful endeavors to promote the interests of his kingdom? What have I done for Him who gave his life a ransom for me?"

A distinction has been made between the *habitual* and the *actual* preparation for the Lord's Supper. Every Christian possesses the former, but there may still be need for the latter. He may be in

possession of all the graces of the Spirit, but they may not be in vigorous exercise. Our approach to the Lord's Table should ever be preceded by self-examination, meditation, prayer and the renewal of our dedication to the service of God. We are told that Dr. Moses Hoge (whose remains are interred in the graveyard of the Third Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia) seldom slept on the night before the administration of the ordinance when he expected to officiate on the occasion. So absorbed was his mind in meditating on the love and the sufferings of Christ that sleep departed from him. Dr. Payson's people were in the practice of observing a quarterly fast before the communion, spending several hours in humiliation and prayer. It was at a service preparatory to the communion that the memorable sermon was preached

in Scotland which resulted in the hopeful conversion of about five hundred souls. Our churches generally hold what is denominated "the preparatory service"—a most appropriate one, truly, for the approaching solemnities. Well would it be were there a more general and devout observance of this service by our church-members. In this bustling age we have great need to lay aside the world with its cares and have our hearts suitably engaged as we leave our vows at God's altar.

"Searcher of hearts, oh search me still;
The secrets of my soul reveal;
My fears remove; let me appear
To God and my own conscience clear.
May I, consistent with thy word,
Approach thy Table, O my Lord?
May I among the saints appear?
Shall I a welcome guest be there?"

VI.

ENTERING INTO COVENANT WITH GOD.

A COVENANT is an agreement between two or more parties on certain conditions. For God to enter into covenant with man is an act of condescension truly wonderful. He does not simply lay upon us certain obligations, but he also pledges himself that if those obligations be faithfully discharged he will bestow upon us the richest of blessings. This covenant is appropriately denominated a *covenant of grace*. What but grace could induce the Most High thus to deal with man? When a covenant is made between men, there is usually some equality between the contracting parties; but how infinite the disparity

between the Creator and the creature, between the self-existent and eternal Jehovah and worms of the earth, between immaculate purity and sinful defilement ! And yet, insignificant and vile as we are, we are permitted to claim the great and glorious God as our *covenant God*. As our Sovereign he might simply place us under law or encourage us by promise, but he does more. To inspire us with confidence, he makes with us a sacred contract, engaging that if we become his people he will be our God and our portion for ever : “ Incline your ear and come unto me ; hear, and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” And what is the response of his redeemed people ? “ Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.”

We may regard this covenant between God and the believer in two aspects—as a private and as a public transaction.

As a private transaction, it relates solely to the two parties, irrespective of any open profession or manifestation. With a deep sense of his utterly lost, ruined and helpless condition, the sinner accepts the Lord Jesus as his all-sufficient Saviour and gives himself away to be his willing servant for ever. The surrender is always free and cordial. It is made with the full consent of the heart and without the least restraint or compulsion. It is made without reserve; the redeemed sinner withholds nothing. All the energies of his body and all the faculties of his mind—his entire being for this world and for the next—are dedicated to God as his most reasonable service. And the engagement is as perpetual as it is free and unqualified.

Henceforth, living or dying, he is the Lord's.

Listen to the language of the penitent believer as in solemn retirement he makes the sacred engagement:

“Glorious and blessed God! I, the creature of thy hand, the subject of thy government and the purchase of a Redeemer's blood, do now bow before thee with the profoundest reverence, humility and contrition, owning thy sovereign right to all I am and all I have. With shame and self-condemnation do I confess all my criminal violations of thy law and my ungrateful abuse of thy goodness. If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand in thy holy presence? Behold, I am vile, and merit from thy hand nothing but thy sore displeasure. But with thee there is forgiveness and plenteous redemption. Look upon me not as I am in myself—a

guilty sinner—but as I am represented in my adorable Redeemer and Advocate. For his sake blot out my transgressions and receive me, a returning prodigal, into thy redeemed family. From this memorable day I will be thine alone. My body, soul, time and talents I now dedicate to thy service, and do thou grant me grace to fulfill my solemn vow!

“‘ Lord, I am thine—entirely thine—
Purchased and saved by blood divine ;
Thine would I live, thine would I die,
Be thine through all eternity.’ ”

Such is the nature of this covenant into which the believer enters with God regarded as a private transaction. We may now consider it as a *public act* by which the convert comes out from the the world, assumes the obligations of a religious profession, identifies himself

with the people of God and seals the sacred contract at the communion-table. The gospel requires us not only to possess faith in Christ, but also to profess it: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In our Authorized Version of the Scriptures we have two words expressive of this public acknowledgment of Christ as our Saviour — "profession" and "confession" — both derived from the same word in the original (Heb. iv. 14; Matt. x. 32; Rom. x. 10, 11). To profess Christ is to confess him. In the early days of Christianity this was emphatically the case. A professor then was also a confessor—one who bore witness to the truth amid severe persecution. At the present day we may not be called to endure the same trial, and yet in an important sense every professor should also be a confes-

sor. The offence of the cross has not ceased. As the disciples of Jesus, we should be prepared to follow him through evil as well as through good report—to follow him even unto death, rejoicing that we are counted worthy to suffer for Him who gave himself a ransom for us.

Such a profession is one of the most solemn acts a man can perform. He now commits himself to the service of God. From the obligations now assumed there is no release. And yet the step is one which the true convert will never regret. Happy day when, in the presence of God's angels and of men, he gave himself away in a covenant never to be revoked and sealed his vow of fidelity in receiving the sacramental elements! He who has inclined him to make the engagement will also grant him needed grace to keep it unto the end.

VII.

COMMUNION WITH CHRIST.

WE call the sacrament of the Lord's Supper *the Communion*; and the term is clearly authorized by the Scriptures: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" The cup and the bread being emblems of the shed blood and the crucified body of Christ, in partaking of them we hold communion both with our crucified Saviour and with his redeemed people. The word "communion" is used in reference to things possessed in common, denoting mutual

affection and community in sympathies, in views and in interests.

All communion with Christ is based on mutual affection: "How can two walk together except they be agreed?" Between beings of opposite character, beings hostile to each other, there can be no fellowship. Man's natural state being one of disaffection to Christ, he can find no delight in his presence or in the contemplation of his character: "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" To the believer alone is the Saviour "the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

From this mutual affection arises mutual sympathy. Christ and his people are so identified that the sufferings of the one become in a certain sense

the sufferings of the other: "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." And, as our merciful High Priest, he is represented as still "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," having once been "tempted in all points as we are." And do not his people also "suffer with him"? Does not the apostle speak of having "fellowship with Christ in his sufferings," and also of "filling up that which is behind of the affections of Christ"? The various sufferings of the Redeemer were altogether peculiar, such as he alone could endure. We could hardly say with the poet:

"Give me to feel thine agony,
One drop of thy sad cup afford."

No mortal could even taste that bitter cup and live. Yet it may be said that believers are identified with him even

in suffering. They suffer in the same cause and with the same spirit. Like him, they bear the persecutions of the world, because, like him, they are "not of the world." "Rejoice," says Peter, "inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings."

Whatever joy the believer may feel in view of the blessed fruits of a Saviour's sufferings, he cannot but deeply sympathize with those sufferings, especially when he reflects that they were endured by the innocent for the guilty—"the just for the unjust." The whole narrative of the Saviour's insults and wrongs, his indignities and tortures, his depression and anguish, makes the strongest appeal to human sympathy, and it furnishes one of the saddest evidences of human perversity that his sufferings produce so little impression. Even the sufferings of a murderer on

the gallows will move the hearts of the spectators, but how utterly unmoved are many in view of the thrilling scene of Calvary! There are some who, though they may be deeply affected by a description of the *corporeal* sufferings of the Redeemer, have no sympathy with his mental agony. Speak to them of the thorns, the nails, the spear, the blood, and you may possibly touch some fibre of the heart; but of his inward anguish, the sorrow of his soul even unto death, the thick darkness that shrouded his spirit, they appear incapable of forming any conception. Divine grace softens the heart. Touched by it, the natural sensibilities are quickened and sanctified, and the sorrows of the dying Redeemer awaken the tenderest emotions.

But there is a still higher sense in which the believer has communion with

the sufferings of Christ. Not only is his heart tenderly affected by those sufferings, but he also enters fully into their design and importance. He entertains the same views of the righteousness of the law, the evil of sin, the ruin of the race and the necessity of an atonement to satisfy the demands of justice that the Saviour himself had when he gave his life a ransom for man. Nothing but the woeful apostasy, the helpless misery, of our world brought him to earth and led him to offer himself as a sacrifice upon the cross. The fate of the world was suspended upon that one meritorious offering. The death of Christ was an amazing exhibition, not merely of mercy, but of mercy blended with justice. It proclaimed the law to be most righteous, while at the same time it furnished an expedient by which its penalty might be remitted

and the guilty restored to the divine favor.

The believer now looks upon the world in the same light in which its Redeemer did when he came to its rescue. He can find no hope for himself nor for a single human being save in the sacrifice of the cross. In no other name but the name of Jesus dare he approach the Majesty of heaven. While he adores the grace that can pardon the guilty, he bows with reverence before the violated law, now armed with double force, and acquiesces in the justice which, rather than suffer any dishonor, exacted its claims from the Victim of Calvary.

Between Christ and his people there is also a communion of interests. They live for the same object for which he lived and died and for which he now intercedes before the throne—the re-

demption of a world from sin and misery. His cause is their cause, his joy is their joy, his triumph is their triumph, and his glory is their glory. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

This communion is not a mere dream of the imagination, but a blessed reality. "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." This secret of the Lord, however, is with them that fear him. To the world it is all a mystery.

Communion with Christ may be regarded either as a *state* or as an *act*. As a state, it is habitual. Wherever the Christian may be, or however he may be engaged, he feels that his Saviour is ever nigh, and that he is joined to him

by one spirit. In the watches of the night, in the business of the day, in the midst of company, on a bed of sickness, at home or abroad, he may have direct communion with the unseen yet everywhere present Object of his confidence and love.

This communion of spirit may also be maintained and assisted by appropriate means, such as the reading of the Scriptures, private devotion, the worship of the sanctuary and the sacramental Supper. "Our drinking of the wine in the cup is a religious action whereby and wherein Christ communicates himself and his grace to us and we communicate our souls to him; so that Christ and believers in that action have a mutual communion one with another."

Such honor have all the saints. What unspeakable dignity and what exalted happiness! No joy on earth can com-

pare with it, especially with those memorable seasons when the believer is favored with the special visits of divine grace, and when every bar to this sacred intercourse seems removed. Heaven now comes down to earth, and we have already the foretaste of celestial bliss:

“The opening heavens around me shine
With beams of sacred bliss;
While Jesus shows his heart is mine,
And whispers I am his.”

VIII.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

“I BELIEVE in the communion of saints.” This is a most precious article of the Creed, and one of the blessed privileges of the gospel. It is inseparable from the communion with Christ, and partakes, in some respects, of the same nature. One with him, we are one with all his followers; united to the Head, we are united to all the members: “If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” How clearly is this indicated in the sacrament of the Supper! “We, being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.” As the different parts of

the bread make one loaf, so the different portions or members of Christ's Church form substantially one body. The same emblems of the Saviour's death are received by all, thus recognizing their union to him and to each other.

The communion of saints is founded upon their *union*. True believers sustain to one another a common and a most intimate relation. They are all members of the same family, built upon the same foundation, sheep of the same fold, branches of the same vine, parts of the same body. For all has there been shed the same atoning blood, and all are partakers of the same divine nature. They all have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." They embrace substantially the same views respecting man's fall and man's recovery. They are subjects of the same gracious experience, grounding their hopes on the

same sure foundation and exhibiting the same fruits of the Spirit. They are participants of the same privileges, justified freely by faith in the great atonement, "accepted in the Beloved" and made heirs of an eternal inheritance. They are enlisted in the same cause and are fighting under the same banner. They contend against the same enemies and are furnished with the same armor. They have common trials and common supports and comforts; and when their warfare is ended, they will share in the same glorious triumph—the whole sacramental host presented before the throne with palms of victory and songs of rejoicing. The Church of God is, and ever has been, one—one in all ages and in all countries. It has but one Head, one Saviour, one Spirit, one doctrine, one hope, one life, one cause, one destiny.

The prayer of the Saviour for the union Church has thus been answered—not to its full extent, but yet so manifestly as to leave no doubt of the Church's identity. Between the followers of Christ there is an invisible bond of union rising far above all ecclesiastical organizations—a fellowship of spirit independent of any forms or modes of worship and unaffected by clime, complexion or earthly distinction. Find them where you may, and it will be seen that they breathe the same spirit and exhibit the same features of character. Let them be brought together from different parts of the earth, and, whatever may be their national distinctions or the mode of their religious training, heart will echo to heart and speech will answer to speech.

A Hindu and a New Zealander once met upon the deck of a missionary-ship.

They had been converted from heathenism and were brothers in Christ, but each was totally ignorant of the language of the other. They pointed to their Bibles, shook hands and smiled in each other's faces, but could give no further expression to their feelings. At length a happy thought occurred to the Hindu. With sudden joy he exclaimed, "Hallelujah!" The New Zealander in delight responded, "Amen!" These two words—not found in either tongue, but furnished by the gospel—called forth in each heart the most joyful emotions and evinced their entire oneness in their common Saviour.

Diversity is by no means inconsistent with unity. Men will no more think alike on all points than they will look alike in all their features. A difference in their mental constitution and in their education will produce a difference of

sentiment. It is doubtful whether entire unity in regard to minor points of Christian doctrine will ever exist in this state of imperfection. There is, however, such an essential oneness with all who are born of God as to join them in the most cordial fellowship. Notwithstanding their denominational peculiarities, they read the same Bible, sing the same hymns, approach the same throne of grace, surround the same communion-table and labor for the promotion of the same great interests of truth and righteousness.

What mutual love and sympathy should ever exist between those who are so closely identified! The sufferings of one member of Christ's mystical body should be shared by all; the prosperity of one branch of the Christian Church should be an occasion of joy to all. Our different evangelical denom-

inations should be regarded only as so many different apartments in the same spiritual temple, or as so many different regiments in the same glorious army. Nothing is so much at variance with the spirit of Christianity and tends more to hinder its progress—nothing is so calculated to prejudice the world against the gospel and to bring a stigma upon the Church of God—as are the strifes of professed Christians. Let it ever be said as it was said of old: “See how these Christians love one another!”

The communion of saints embraces the whole household of faith—not only those with whom we are immediately associated, but those whose faces we may never behold until we behold them in heaven. This holy communion extends even beyond the boundaries of time to those who have entered into their eternal rest. “Ye are come,” says

Paul, "to the spirits of the just made perfect." With all this glorified throng we hold the most delightful fellowship—fellowship with the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs and those loved ones with whom we were once associated, and who have preceded us to glory. The Church of God on earth and in heaven is one, one portion being the Church militant, the other the Church triumphant.

"The saints on earth, and all the dead,
But one communion make;
All join in Christ, their living Head,
And of his grace partake."

In our various church relations this communion of the saints assumes a visible form and manifestation. This is especially the case when we surround the sacramental board. Here we recognize each other as one in Christ,

and declare to the world that oneness. Let us see, then, that we “keep the feast, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”—that we “love one another with a pure heart fervently,” bearing one another’s burdens, seeking each other’s edification. Thus shall the fellowship of kindred minds on earth be like that in heaven, and the union commenced here be consummated and perpetuated for ever around the throne of God and the Lamb.

IX.

SALVATION BY GRACE.

“Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there’s room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?”

“’Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly forced me in,
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin.”

“By the grace of God I am what I am.” It is related of that eminently godly man, the Rev. John Newton, that as he drew near his eternal rest he uttered the following affecting soliloquy on this passage while engaged in family devotion: “I am not what I *ought* to be. Ah! how imperfect and deficient! I am

not what I *wish* to be. I abhor that which is evil, and I would cleave to what is good. I am not what I *hope* to be. Soon, soon, I shall put off mortality, and with mortality all sin and imperfection. Yet, though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say I am not what I once was—a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge ‘*by the grace of God I am what I am.*’”

Paul traced every blessing he received to the grace, the unmerited favor, of God—all his piety, all his hopes, all his endowments, all his usefulness. And such is the spirit of every child of God: great and marvelous as is the change he has experienced, he ascribes it wholly to divine grace.

Listen to the story of God's gracious dealings with him :

“What am I, and how came I to be what I am? In my *character* I certainly am not what I was once. I find an entire change in my views, my feelings, my desires, my aims and my sympathies. The time was when my understanding was darkened and I had no spiritual perception of divine things; now I see their reality, their importance and their excellency. Once I could discover in God nothing to admire and to love; now he appears to me supremely good and glorious. Once I looked upon sin as a trifle; now I regard it as vile and odious.

“As to myself, the complacent views I once entertained of my own goodness have all fled, and I feel that my best deeds come far short of the perfect standard of duty and afford no ground of justification before God. My confidence, instead of being based on my

own righteousness, now rests solely on the atonement of Jesus, and I hope for acceptance before the tribunal of heaven only through the merits of his blood. While I rely solely upon his mediation, I find my heart drawn out to him in most fervent gratitude and love, and I feel myself identified with him in all his gracious designs in reference to this lost world. I have given myself wholly away to his service, and it is in yielding obedience to his precepts that I desire my highest happiness.

“ I am, indeed, not yet what I ought to be, nor what I expect to be: I still carry about with me a body of sin and death, and I have need to keep up a constant warfare with my spiritual foes; but with quiet trust and simple confidence I am following on to know the Lord, and the whole current of my thoughts and my aspirations is turned

from the fading objects of time to the invisible realities of eternity.

“And, as there is a radical change in my character, so also is there in my state. I am a pardoned sinner. I once stood exposed to the tremendous curse of a violated law; now the sentence is revoked, the black catalogue of my crimes has been canceled, and the Holy Spirit has entered into my heart as the Comforter, sealing me unto the day of redemption.

“Such is what, I trust, I am. But how came I to be so?

“Was it because of any native goodness in me? Ah, no! In common with others I inherited a nature totally sinful, and all my works were works of sin and death.

“Had I naturally any disposition to embrace the overtures of the gospel? Surely not. The kind invitation met me:

‘Come, for all things are now ready;’ but I begged to be excused. God called, and I refused; he stretched out his hand, but I did not regard him.

“Had I any claim on the divine favor? ‘Claim’! My just desert was death—eternal death. Neither my prayers nor my tears nor my best deeds placed God under the least obligation to me.

“‘What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?

’Twas “even so, Father”! I ever must sing,
Because it seemed good in thy sight.’

“‘By the grace of God I am what I am.’ What but grace made me sensible of my condition as a sinner and of my need of a Saviour? It was grace that first shed light upon my darkened understanding, arrested me in my wayward course and extorted from my

lips the cry, 'What must I do to be saved?'

"It was grace that inclined me to accept the offer of a free salvation, quickened me into spiritual life and implanted within me the hope of immortal bliss.

"And what but grace has thus far preserved me in my conflicts and my trials? I find in my heart a constant proneness to wander from God. I live in a world of temptation. My faith is often assailed by the fierce darts of the adversary. My help has been in God alone, and it is only through his abounding grace that I hope for final victory over all my foes and the crown of unfading glory before the eternal throne.

"Then let me be humble. Where is boasting? It is utterly excluded. I have nothing of which to boast. All the holiness I possess is the fruit, not of nature, but of grace. Let me never

forget what I once was, what I now am, and to what I am indebted for the wondrous change. Let me take my position in the dust and place the crown upon that sacred head which alone is worthy to wear it.

“And let me also be *thankful*. Never can I repay the debt of gratitude I owe to Him who bought me with his blood and saved me by his grace. Let this heart ever glow with the purest and the warmest affection. Let these lips show forth in the most animated strains the praise of his adorable name, and let all my plans, all my pursuits, all my doings, have reference to his will and to his glory.”

X.

SALVATION BY BLOOD.

SALVATION is not only by grace, but by blood. It is not only unmerited favor, but favor flowing to us solely through the sacrifice of the cross: "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." How impressively is this great truth taught us in the Lord's Supper! "This cup," said Jesus, "is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Thus have we not only a standing memorial of the Saviour's death, but also of that vital doctrine of our religion, the atonement of the Son of God.

And how perfectly does this accord

with the uniform teaching of the Scriptures! "We are not redeemed with corruptible things as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;" "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin;" "The blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel;" "Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, ye have no life in you."

And what mean the expiatory offerings of old? Why those daily sacrifices morning and evening? Why that national offering annually on the great day of atonement? Could there have been any efficacy in these sacrifices themselves? Their significance and their importance were derived entirely from their typical nature. All pointed to that one meritorious Offering which in the fullness of time was made on

Calvary—to “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.” “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin,”

“But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away—
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.”

In all ages of the world there has been but one way of salvation. The same atoning blood that saves us saved Abel, saved Noah, saved Enoch, saved Abraham. Christ crucified constituted the grand theme of the apostolic ministry. Paul gloried only in the cross of Christ, and his great desire was to be found in him, clothed in his all-perfect righteousness and washed in his all-cleansing blood. Not a soul has ever entered heaven but by the blood

of the cross. The whole company of the redeemed with one harmonious voice ascribe their salvation to the once-bleeding but now exalted Saviour: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Is God, then, vindictive and implacable? Surely not. The atonement is the fruit of his love. It was not designed to render him merciful, but to open a way by which his mercy might flow unobstructed and in perfect accordance with the claims of justice. God is not only a Father, but a Governor. He has placed man under a law, and enforced obedience by the most weighty sanctions. As a sinner, man stands exposed to the penalty of transgression;

and if that penalty is remitted, it must be in a way consistent with the glory of the divine perfections, with the stability of heaven's throne, and with the interests of the moral universe. In the atonement we have the wonderful expedient by which the obstacles to the extension of pardon are removed and the character and the government of God are honored in the view of the intelligent creation: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, . . . that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Ye sons of men, ye angels of light, look now upon that cross, and behold there both "the goodness and the severity of God." Stand in awe, and sin not; for if these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

Now, if "grace reigns," it reigns through righteousness: "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." If the sinner is pardoned, his Substitute must suffer; the death of the one is the life of the other. Our salvation, from the beginning to the end, is traced to the sacrifice of the immaculate Redeemer. Are we reconciled to God? It is "by the death of his Son." Are we pardoned? "In him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin." Are we cleansed from our moral defilement? "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Do we draw nigh to God? "Ye who were some time afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Do we overcome our spiritual enemies? It is "by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony." Do we enter heaven,

the holy of holies? It is "by the blood of Jesus:" "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

How vain, then, are the hopes of men built on any other foundation save that which is laid in the blood of the atonement! No matter on what those hopes are based, they must all prove worthless. On every Jewish altar, on every sacramental table, on every evangelical pulpit, on every harp in glory, is written in characters clear and legible: "*No salvation but by blood.*" Here, then, let me rest my hope.

In that solemn hour when I am called to bid adieu to the scenes of earth and to enter upon the untried realities of eternity, let the eye of my faith be steadfastly fixed upon the cross as my sole confidence and trust; and in the great day of final accounts, when I

stand before God, let me look for acceptance, not on the ground of my defective goodness, but on the blood of the everlasting covenant, the perfect righteousness of my sin-atonement Redeemer.

XI.

THE BITTER CUP.

THE word "cup" is often used in Scripture in a figurative sense to denote that which it contains: "Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over;" "I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord." So, too, we read of a "cup of fury," a "cup of trembling;" "Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup."

The sufferings of Christ are sometimes designated as a cup: "The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink it?" "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;"

“This cup is the new testament in my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

Bitter indeed was the cup which Jesus drank when he became our Substitute. Never was there any sorrow like his sorrow. In contemplating his sufferings we are too apt to dwell merely on those which were the result of external causes, overlooking the intenser sufferings of his soul. We think of his extreme poverty, his bitter persecution, his cruel death; but we fail to be impressed as we should be with his soul-anguish.

Witness him in the Garden of Gethsemane. No human hand is near him; no crown of thorns is on his head; no spikes lacerate his limbs; yet “my soul,” he cries, “is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”

And when expiring on the cross we

hear from him no complaint of the torture of crucifixion, but only of the desolation of his spirit, enveloped in a cloud of which the surrounding darkness of Nature afforded but a faint emblem. It seemed as if he were abandoned by both heaven and earth when he cried, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

The Liturgy of the Greek Church contains the following affecting prayer: "By all thy sufferings, known and unknown, O Lord, deliver us!" His *unknown* sufferings far exceeded the known. "We look with wonder at the mournful scene and listen with heartfelt sympathy to his cry of distress, but who can form any adequate conception of the agony of his spirit? We can comprehend neither the precise nature nor degree of his sufferings. His sufferings were altogether peculiar, such

as no mortal ever endured, or could endure. It is emphatically *Christ that died*—died as no one ever died or ever will die. He made his *soul* an offering for sin. Great as were the sufferings of the martyrs, they bear no comparison with the sufferings of the Redeemer. Theirs were chiefly corporeal; his were mental. They were sustained by the light of God's countenance; from him that light was withdrawn. Jesus died, not simply as a martyr, but as a Saviour." He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that we might be brought to God. Though innocent himself, he is treated as if guilty. The concentrated woes of the whole human race seem to have been laid upon him, and no wonder he sank under the enormous weight. "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

That devoted minister of Christ, the

Rev. John Fletcher, is said to have been eminently distinguished for his sensibility to human suffering. Hardly a night would he pass without spending a good part of it in groans for the people of his charge. But, sensitive as was his spirit, there was a time when he became greatly distressed at the thought that his sympathies came so far short of those which had been manifested by his Saviour. He now prayed that he might possess this spirit in a higher degree. This prayer seems to have been met with an answer; for not long after, as he was visiting a poor sick family, there suddenly came upon him such a painful sense of their affliction that he could scarcely reach his home. As soon as he sat down in his house he was overwhelmed with such a realization of the woes of the human race that it utterly overcame

him and rendered him entirely helpless and unable to move. "At the same time he seemed to lose the use of his memory and all his faculties. He thought, 'What is this? Is it a disease? Is it a stroke of the palsy? Rather, is it not an answer to my own ill-judged though well-intended prayer? Did I not ask a burden unsuitable to a finite and capable of being borne only by an infinite being?'"

In this condition he remained some hours, until the Lord again heard his cry and removed from his spirit the intolerable burden.

Who could bear to have a full view of all the misery which sin has entailed on our race and drink the cup of sorrow drunk by our sympathizing Redeemer? Who can analyze the ingredients of that bitter cup? And yet he drank it to its very dregs, "tasting death for every

man" and becoming "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Oh how much did it cost our divine Saviour to purchase our redemption! What reproach, what persecution, what temptation, what torture, what a life of toil and what a death of agony! "The cup of blessing" for which we give thanks was a sorrowful cup to him; and yet how willingly did he take the bitter draught! "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Let me, then, never repine under my sufferings. What are they all compared with those, O my merciful Redeemer, which thou didst endure for me? Let me not only believe in thee, but also learn to suffer for thee; and may it eventually be mine to be for ever glorified with thee!

XII.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AT HIS TABLE.

WHEN our Lord instituted the ordinance of the Supper, he was *visibly* present. That was indeed a highly-favored company which was permitted to look upon his benignant countenance and drink in the gracious words that fell from his lips. With what intense eagerness did they listen to all he uttered on that memorable occasion! How painful was their surprise at the announcement that one of them would prove a traitor!

Were "the Man of sorrows" still on earth, we should doubtless deem it an unspeakable privilege to be in his presence and receive instruction from the great Teacher; "but now," said

he, "I am no more in the world." The heavens have received him "until the times of the restitution of all things," when he will "come a second time without sin unto salvation." His state of humiliation has been exchanged for his state of exaltation, his cross of ignominy for his throne of glory. Far beyond the penetration of mortal eye, he sits enthroned in majesty, receiving the homage of the celestial hosts and ever living to make intercession for us.

But is there not an important sense in which he is still present with his people? Has he not said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in the midst of them"? Did he not promise his disciples that after his departure he would send the Comforter, the Spirit of truth? "At that day ye shall know that

I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." With every devout communicant Jesus is ever present. Nor is that presence merely imaginary or symbolical, but a real and felt presence—not a presence in some mysterious manner connected with the elements, nor in any way or form apprehended by our bodily senses, but by his Spirit communing with his people and rendering the ordinance the means of spiritual refreshment and comfort.

His *essential* presence as "God over all" fills heaven and earth. It can be limited neither by time nor by place. At every communion he is present as the spectator of our conduct and the searcher of our hearts. Should there be a single communicant without "the

wedding-garment" the eye of Omniscience cannot fail to detect the intruder, however veiled to human view his character may be. Let this thought inspire me with becoming reverence, and let me ever be in the sight of God what I appear to be in the sight of man. Let me guard my thoughts, watch over my demeanor and act as though he were visibly before me: "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence by all that are about him."

But is he present merely to scrutinize my heart and my conduct? That, instead of tending to comfort, might rather tend to depress; for who that is conscious of his numerous defects can endure the inspection of infinite Purity? It is the *gracious* presence of the Saviour that inspires us with confidence when we come to his Table. He is here to bless

and to save; here to manifest to us his glory; here to strengthen and confirm our faith; here to assure us of forgiveness; here to sustain and comfort us in our trials; here to listen to our supplications and bestow upon us all needed grace. What sincere communicant has not felt him to be near? Who has not been favored with some fresh token of his love? Who has not heard from his lips the cordial welcome, "Eat, O my friends; drink, O my beloved"? Like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, transported with the glorious vision, we have been ready to say, "It is good to be here!" and we could have wished that we might ever remain in that enraptured frame.

Nothing can compensate for the absence of the Saviour from his Table. The bread and the wine may be there, the minister of the sanctuary may be

there, the guests may be there; but if Jesus be not there, a barren ordinance, indeed, will it prove.

It was once asked in reference to Christ's attendance at the passover, "What think ye, will he come to the feast?" How appropriate the question in reference to his presence at his Table! If Jesus be there, then shall it prove to me a feast of love and joy; but if he be absent, or if the light of his face be hid-den, my heart will remain desolate and my harp be suspended on the willows in melancholy silence.

Let me see, then, that I invite him to accompany me, and that my heart be open to the visits of his grace. "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him and he with me." Wonderful condescension! blessed com-

munion! "Christ in me the hope of glory"—the very foretaste of that more exalted fellowship which I hope for ever to enjoy with him in his kingdom.

"Come in, come in, thou heavenly Guest,
Nor ever hence remove;
Come sup with me, and let the feast
Be everlasting love."

XIII.

THE ABIDING PRESENCE.

THE *gracious* presence of the Saviour with his people sometimes seems like the presence of "a wayfaring man who turneth aside to tarry for a night." But never does he abandon his Church, nor will he suffer her enemies ultimately to triumph. Even unto the end of the world will he be with her as her guide and her protector, and then present her at last "a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle." Rather is it that his Church turns from him and loses the clear vision of his love. Seasons of declension have succeeded seasons of revival; seasons when the ways of Zion have mourned because so few have come to her sol-

emn feasts; when iniquity has abounded, and the love of many has waxed cold; when truth has been crushed to the earth or has been so mingled with error as to be rendered powerless; when vital piety has been ignored or despised and the ministry has been shorn of its strength; when conversions have in a great measure ceased. And what, in this respect, is true of the Church as a body, or of particular branches of the Church, is often true in reference to individuals. It is not with them now as once it was. The time was when they felt the Saviour to be near, and they walked in the light of his face. But now he seems to them afar off, and they no longer have fellowship with him. Prayer, instead of being a delight, has become a task; the vision of faith has been dimmed by the intervention of earth, and the soul, bereft of spiritual

enjoyment, is vainly seeking to fill the aching void with the objects of time and of sense. Alas! with what deep humiliation of sorrow have many occasion to exclaim, "Oh that I were as in months past!"

How variable often are the spiritual frames of believers! One day they are on the mount; the next, in the valley. While at the communion-table it seems to them as if they can never lose sight of their Saviour's face, but ere one fleeting hour elapses, behold he is gone, and in bitterness they cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

And why this change? Never does Jesus depart from us unless we first depart from him: "Thou hast hidden thy face because of our iniquities."

It is not always safe to judge our spiritual state by the peculiar frame of our minds, or by the liveliness of our

emotions. Under physical infirmities, violent temptations or afflictive providences, we may fear that God has departed from us, when he may be specially near and may be employing the most effectual means to promote our spiritual progress. But if our want of comfort results from cherished sin or from neglected duty, then have we reason for both alarm and contrition: "I will go and return to my place until they acknowledge their offence and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early."

It is undoubtedly the privilege of believers to enjoy the *abiding* presence of the Saviour. Many have for years enjoyed it with scarcely any interruption, and nothing but unbelief and remissness can prevent it from becoming the common attainment of the Church. And how desirable is the attainment

to the Church universal and to each believer! The redemption of the world can be accomplished only by the constant presence of Christ. The work of conversion, instead of advancing at the present slow rate, must move forward with accelerated power until converts shall be multiplied as the drops of the morning, and until all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God.

Nothing but the abiding presence of Christ can meet the longings of the regenerated heart. Even the temporary withdrawment of that presence leaves a void which nothing else can fill. The sun may pour forth its beams of brightness, the flowers may emit their fragrance, the air may be vocal with the sweetest melodies and all on earth may smile with gladness; but if Jesus hides his face, there can be no comfort for the Christian.

Important as is the apprehended presence of the Saviour at all times, there are seasons when it becomes eminently valuable. "Abide with us," prayed the disciples of Emmaus, "for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent;" and may not we urge a similar reason for the continuance of his presence with us? The evening of life may be rapidly approaching. The keepers of our earthly house are beginning to tremble, and the strong men to bow themselves; the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows are darkened. How much do we need the presence of Jesus to cheer and sustain us in our fast-growing infirmities! Having given to him the dew of youth, we may be sure he will not forsake us in the feebleness of age: "Even to old age I am he, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you."

It will not be long before the shades of death will gather around us all and our spirits will pass away to the unseen world. What but the presence of Jesus can light up the dark valley, support our sinking head, smooth our dying pillow, and conduct us safely to our eternal home? If he smile on us, then may we smile at death and hail his approach, not as the king of terrors, but as the messenger of peace.

Who can tell what may be in reserve for us in the future? How soon may the tenderest ties be sundered, and our dwellings, now the scenes of joy, become the abodes of sorrow! But with the presence of the Redeemer no bereavement, no affliction, can prove intolerable.

Let it, then, be our importunate prayer that in joy and in sorrow, in life and in death, his presence may go with us. The disciples, we are told, *constrained* him to

tarry, and he went in and tarried with them (Luke xxiv. 29). Thus let us plead with him. Let the request be one not of mere compliment, but of sincere and ardent desire. Let us part with everything rather than part with him.

“ Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear,
It is not night if thou be near ;
Oh may no earth-born cloud arise
To hide thee from thy servant’s eyes.
When soft the dews of kindly sleep
My wearied eyelids gently steep,
Be my last thought, How sweet to rest
For ever on my Saviour’s breast !

“ Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without thee I cannot live ;
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without thee I cannot die.
Be near to bless me when I wake,
Ere through the world my way I take ;
Abide with me till in thy love
I lose myself in heaven above.”

XIV.

NOT OUR OWN.

COUNT ZINZENDORF is said to have owed his fervent devotion to the Saviour to seeing written beneath a picture of the crucifixion this inscription: "This I did for thee: what doest thou for me?" An abiding impression was produced on his mind, and henceforth no sacrifice was by him deemed too great to make for the Redeemer who died for him.

May we not regard the appeal as made to each communicant? and should it not awaken both the warmest gratitude and the closest self-examination? We have already dwelt on the matchless love of Christ, but we must acknowledge that we feel ashamed and humbled that we

have so utterly failed to do justice to the wondrous theme. We need immortal tongues when we speak of that eternal love, but even with them who could show forth all its praise? It is from this love we are to derive the most persuasive motive to self-consecration. To no one are we under such sacred obligations as we are to Him who paid our ransom-price, and to no one should our hearts flow forth with more devout gratitude and praise. We are Christ's by creation, but much more by redemption: "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

When the price of our redemption was paid, "the sun felt that its brightness was not its own, and shone not; the earth felt that its strength was not its own, and trembled; the dead felt

that their graves were not their own, and came forth; angels felt that their harps were not their own, and were silent. No wonder! The Lord of life and glory was not his own on that awful day. He was then the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. He neither lived for himself nor died for himself whilst he was in our world, and both in living and in dying he left us an example that we should walk in his steps."

Surely, then, I am not my own. My body, my soul—all I am and all I have—belong to my adorable Lord. Let him have my warmest love, my undivided energies, my unremitting service. My only regret is that I have not more to render him in return for his amazing kindness. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?"

“ Had I ten thousand thousand hearts,
I'd give them all to thee;
Had I ten thousand thousand tongues,
Not one should silent be.”

You have left your vow at the altar, and God has recorded it on high; and now it is your sincere inquiry, “How shall I manifest the love I bear to my Redeemer? What does he require of me? What does he expect from me? What will most tend to honor his name and to gratify his heart of benevolence? Were he still a pilgrim on the earth, I would do all I could to minister to his wants. I would welcome him to my home and provide for him the best entertainment; I would consider it an honor to wash his feet. If he needed a garment, I would furnish it; and if defamed, I would defend him at any sacrifice.”

It is not thus we can now show our

love to him, yet there are ways in which it can be done with equal acceptance: "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Here, then, is a decisive proof of our regard. Nothing has such a tendency to honor him in the eyes of the world as have the holy and exemplary lives of his followers. Here is an argument the most convincing in favor of Christianity. When the most powerful appeals from the pulpit have failed, the heart has been won by a consistent Christian example. Let us strive, then, to walk worthy of our vocation—worthy of the Master whom we serve, of the profession we have made, and of the hopes we entertain. What we profess to be at the communion-table let us be in our daily deportment. In reference to all our conduct let us ask, "Will it honor Christ? Is it in accordance with his will? Will it commend his religion

to the world?" Carry your religion not merely to the sanctuary, but to the office, the counting-room, the store, the shop, the farm. Carry it with you in your business, your associations, your recreations. Let it be seen in the evenness of your temper, in the uprightness of your transactions, in the gentleness of your manner, in your patient endurance of trials, and in your faithful discharge of every relative and social duty.

The Saviour has a cause on the earth—the cause for which he once died, and for which he now makes intercession: the cause of human redemption, the restoration of this apostate world to the lost image and favor of God. In the promotion of this cause he permits his people to take part, to be coworkers with him; and there is no way by which we can better evince our regard to him than by our deep sympathy

with his gracious purpose and by self-denying efforts for its accomplishment: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." We are to live for the same great object for which he lived. It was his mission to purchase redemption; it is ours to proclaim it to a world lying in death. The feast of love is prepared; our work is to go out into the highways and the hedges of the country and into the streets and the lanes of the city and invite guests to partake of it.

In this work of mercy every member of the Church is called to do something. We cannot all do the same thing, but each one has his place and his employment. To some are given five talents; to others, two; and to others, one talent. Some are called to preach the gospel; some, to teach in

the Sabbath-school; some, to engage in tract-distribution; some, to sustain the institutions of benevolence by their munificent offerings. The feeblest of Christ's flock need not live in vain. There is work for all; and if our attachment to the Saviour be sincere, it will be our highest ambition to serve him in the advancement of his kingdom. We shall deem it an unspeakable honor to make any sacrifices for him, to suffer for him, to die for him. If we have ever tasted the preciousness of his love, how can we look but with the deepest commiseration upon those who are yet estranged from him? How can we cease our prayers and our efforts while a single soul remains without an interest in the great salvation? For what have we been redeemed, for what have we been called into the vineyard, for what are we continued on

earth, for what are we associated as members of the Christian Church, but that we may urge forward the glorious triumphs of redeeming mercy? Not one of us need go to heaven alone. Saved ourselves, it is our exalted privilege to become the instruments of salvation to others; and every soul we are the means of winning to Christ will not only add to the lustre of his crown, but will enhance our own happiness in his eternal kingdom.

“The love of Christ constraineth us.” Let this love take full possession of the heart, and no duty would be regarded as too self-denying, no sacrifice too great, as an expression of our gratitude to our suffering Redeemer. At the call of God our young men would spring forward, glad to serve him in the most difficult fields of labor; the hand of liberality would be most cheerfully

opened, and the treasury of the Lord be filled even to overflowing; the banner of the cross would be unfurled in every land, and earth's jubilee would be celebrated by the happy millions redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

XV.

THE NEW SONG.

WE are told that after the celebration of the Lord's Supper by Christ and his apostles "they sang a hymn." The hymn, or psalm, is not mentioned, but no doubt it was a sacred composition which the Jews were accustomed to sing at their passover, now succeeded by the festival of the holy communion.

Our hymnology abounds in effusions admirably adapted to the Lord's Table, and it is highly proper that our approach to it should be both commenced and concluded with praise. What theme can more appropriately occupy our thoughts and inspire our devotions on

these solemn occasions than the great event so impressively set forth in the ordinance: *redemption by the blood of Christ?* This is the *new song* which in heaven is sung in rapturous strains reverberating over the domains of bliss “like the sound of many waters and the voice of a great thunder.”

The song is *new* because it relates to a new occasion, pertains to a new event. When this world was called into existence, “the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy.” That was the song of creation—an event which the angelic hosts might well celebrate with adoring wonder, and which Milton has represented the happy pair in Eden as contemplating with the profoundest admiration:

“These are thy glorious works, Parent of good!

Almighty! thine this universal frame:

Thus wondrous fair, thyself how wondrous, then!”

The song of redemption is altogether peculiar. It contemplates man not merely as a creature, but as a *sinner*—a pardoned and restored sinner. Its theme is not merely the divine goodness, but the divine mercy; “God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself” is the grand wonder of the moral universe. How amazing the condescension! How costly the sacrifice! How glorious the results! Mercy displayed, and yet justice satisfied! The penalty of the law remitted, and yet the law honored! “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men.”

With this exalted theme the believer enters upon his new and divine life: “Thou hast put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God”—a song that no man can learn, no man can sing, unless redeemed by Christ.

He must know not only what it is to be a sinner under condemnation, but also "the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven and whose iniquities are covered." Men of the world are strangers to this bliss. The song of redemption may be on their lips, but it awakens no corresponding emotions in their hearts. The redeemed of the Lord cannot but show forth the praise of their great Deliverer. A sinner saved! What a miracle of grace! "Created anew in Christ Jesus," pardoned, cleansed, a child of God and an heir of glory! With what adoring gratitude must he ever contemplate the wondrous change! Let the devout communicant who has "tasted that the Lord is gracious" go on his way rejoicing in God his Saviour. The new song will ever remain new. New wonders will continue to rise as he advances in his heavenward course. The

theme of redemption can never lose its freshness and its sweetness. The longer we dwell on it, the loftier will be our notes of praise to the exalted Saviour. Paul counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. With him the grand attainment was to "know Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

Are you bowed down with sorrow? Still cease not the work of praise. Sing not only of judgment, but of mercy. Take down your harp from the willows and sing the Lord's song even in a strange land. Is it night? God giveth his beloved "songs in the night." Your song, like that of the nightingale, may be plaintive, but it will be music in heaven and will bring sweet relief to your own spirit. A Chris-

tian lady, during her imprisonment as a witness for the truth, made the following record: "It sometimes seemed to me as if I were a little bird whom the Lord had placed in a cage, and that I had nothing to do but to sing. The joy of my heart gave brightness to the objects around me. The stones of my prison looked in my eyes like rubies. I esteemed them more than all the gaudy brilliancies of a vain world. My heart was full of that joy which thou givest to them that love thee in the midst of their greatest crosses."

Paul and Silas sang in prison, and many a martyr has sung in the flames.

Never has the new song sounded more sweetly than when it has dwelt on the lips of dying saints. Precious have been those oft-repeated songs of Zion as they have been heard in the chamber of sickness and death: "Jesus.

Lover of my soul ;” “ Rock of ages, cleft for me.” A young Brahmin who had recently been converted to Christ was called to die. As he approached his end another young Hindu Christian came to see and to comfort him ; and as the dying Brahmin laid his languishing head on the bosom of his young friend he broke out in ecstasy, and said in his native tongue, “ Sing, brother, sing !”—“ And what shall I sing ?” was the inquiry of his friend. —“ Sing salvation—salvation through the death of Jesus !”

The new song does not cease at death, but in strains higher and sweeter will be prolonged for ever. An innumerable company are even now sending forth their pealing anthems to the Lamb that was slain, and eventually the whole redeemed Church, with one harmonious voice, will unite in grateful ascription

of praise to Him to whom it is so justly due.

We know, indeed, but little of the music of heaven; its lofty notes have never reached our ears. We have, however, reason to believe that in that happy world there is, as the godly John Newton remarked, "something analogous to what we call music, though different in kind, and vastly superior in effect to any strains that can be produced by the most exquisite voices or instruments upon earth."

"Let music charm me last on earth,
And greet me first in heaven."

XVI.

THE LAST COMMUNION.

THE Lord's Supper is not only a memorial of the past, but it is also a pledge of the future. While it leads our thoughts to the first coming of Christ, it directs them also to his second. It assures us that He who once came as a sufferer will eventually come as our righteous Judge: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."

The ordinance is to be perpetuated to the end of the world; it was not a mere temporary institution designed for the immediate disciples. The coming of which the apostle speaks refers not

to the Saviour's coming in the outpouring of his Spirit and the establishment of his Church, but to his second visible advent to judge the world. Accordingly, in all ages of the Christian Church, the ordinance has been regarded as sacred and of perpetual obligation. In the days of the apostles the faithful were accustomed, in their religious services, to hold communion with one another and with their divine Head in "the breaking of bread," and in all subsequent periods of the Church professed Christians generally have celebrated the communion as an essential part of public worship. Its observance will cease only at the second advent of Christ, when it will be no longer needed, just as the ordinance of the passover was abolished when its typical import was fulfilled in the sacrifice of the cross. How impressively are we thus reminded

at every communion of that momentous event—the appearance of the Son of God in his majesty and glory! No truth is more clearly taught in the Scriptures than this. In the sacramental Supper the second advent is so connected with the first as to form one continuous chain, each communion celebrated constituting one link in the chain. The certainty of the first advent fully assures us of the certainty of the second. “Ye men of Galilee,” said the angels to the wondering disciples, “why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” “He shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”—“come a second time without sin unto salvation.”

To the unbelieving world the advent of Christ would be altogether unexpected. Immersed in the pursuits and the pleasures of earth, the multitude will remain utterly incredulous and indifferent as to the predicted event, with scoffing lips exclaiming, "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Sudden as the midnight cry the archangel's trump sounds, calling the world to judgment. With what surprise and consternation do the guilty throng listen to the summons! What paleness gathers on their countenances, and what imploring cries ascend for mercy! The rush of business ceases, the profane oath trembles on the lips, the intoxicating glass drops to the ground, the hand of the assassin is palsied, the sound of revelry is hushed,

and every eye is fixed with wonder and with awe upon the descending Judge.

But now behold a different scene. The friends of Jesus, assembled in the sanctuary, are devoutly celebrating the love of their Redeemer. On the table lie the symbols of his broken body and his shed blood. There stands his ministering servant, with holy pathos expatiating on the glorious work of redemption and the debt of gratitude due to Calvary's Sufferer. There sits the aged pilgrim who has long borne the burden and the heat of the day, waiting with joyful expectation the coming of his Lord. There is the young convert who has just tasted the sweetness of redeeming love and for the first time is sealing his vow of fidelity at the sacred board.

In the midst of this service the Son of God appears: "In a moment, in the

twinkling of an eye," the living are changed, and at the same time the dead are raised to life. The blessed company now leave the world behind to meet the Lord in the air, and to be welcomed into his kingdom; the sacred elements still lie on the table, but are of no further use. Faith is turned into sight and hope into fruition. He who was once represented symbolically now appears in visible form, and his people, instead of beholding him through signs and seals, now behold him face to face and dwell for ever in his presence.

To the believer the second advent should present no terrors, but should ever be contemplated with delightful anticipation. Why need he fear to stand before "the great white throne," when the Judge will be the very Saviour whose love he has so often celebrated, and whose blood has atoned for

all his guilt? "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." If the Son of God shall be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," he will also "come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe." To them the day of judgment will be, not the day of wrath, but the day of redemption. Well, therefore, did the apostle exhort his brethren to "look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ." It is the continual cry of the redeemed Church: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

"The unbelieving world shall wail,
While we rejoice to see the day;
Come, Lord, nor let thy promise fail,
Nor let thy chariot long delay."

XVII.

THE MARRIAGE-SUPPER OF THE LAMB.

WE have now reached a period in our meditations when the observance of the sacramental Supper has ceased and the whole Church of God has been gathered home. But if the festival commemorative of the Saviour's death is no longer observed, being no longer needed, it will be immediately succeeded by a banquet that will be perpetuated for ever—*the marriage-supper of the Lamb*. "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb!"

The happiness of heaven is described in the Scriptures under the similitude of a feast, the guests consisting of all who are "redeemed from the earth." The

number being completed, the happy company will take their places around the festive board and with thankful hearts participate in the rich provision of redeeming grace: "They shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;" "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."

Among the ancients supper was the principal meal, and marriage-feasts were often celebrated at great expense and with the highest demonstrations of joy. Such a feast will eventually be celebrated in honor of the Son of God: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son."

The relation between Christ and his Church is frequently represented in the Scriptures by the sacred union between

husband and wife. Christ is the Bridegroom, and the Church is his bride. The consummation of this relation will take place or be fully realized when the bride, consisting of the complete number of the redeemed, shall be presented before the throne arrayed in her garments of beauty and spotless purity. The marriage-supper, therefore, as one significantly remarks, will be celebrated "on the evening of the day of judgment." In the fullest sense, it will be celebrated, not on earth, but in heaven; not in temples made with hands, but in the temple of the living God. As our forerunner, Jesus has gone to prepare the place, and in due time where he is his followers shall be also.

What imagination can paint the joy of this occasion? Then, "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, will thy God, O Zion, rejoice over thee." With

what ineffable delight will the Saviour now behold the innumerable company redeemed by his blood "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," their salvation completed, their foes vanquished, their sorrows ended, and the Church militant now the Church triumphant! Now will he "see the travail of his soul and be satisfied." This was "the joy set before him, for which he endured the cross, and despised the shame." Now will he feel himself to be amply rewarded for all his toils and all his sufferings. "It is enough," he exclaims; "my Father, it is enough! Here is the blessed fruit of my agonies; here is the purchase of my atoning blood; here are the trophies of my victorious grace. Welcome, welcome, ye beloved, into my eternal kingdom!" Now "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs of everlasting

joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." How unspeakable their happiness, with natures so fully restored and shining in all the beauty of holiness! Not a single stain is any longer visible, not a single cloud darkens their sky, not a single wave of trouble or sorrow rolls across their peaceful breasts, their bodies fashioned like unto the glorious body of their divine Head and their souls "filled with all the fullness of God." With what interest will all heaven look upon such a scene! Angels gaze with wonder; new sensations of joy and gratitude thrill their bosoms, and every harp is attuned to loftier praise.

Precious to us have been our communion seasons. Often have we felt that we were sitting "in heavenly places in Christ," and were quite reluctant to

come down from the celestial height. But we must descend from the mount, mingle again with the world and pursue our several avocations. If such is the sweetness of the stream, what must it be to drink from the overflowing fountain? If such enjoyment is felt in holding communion with an *unseen* Saviour, what must it be to behold him face to face? This—this will be the consummation of our bliss: we shall be “for ever with the Lord.” Paul knew no heaven save that of being with Christ. The last intercessory prayer of the Redeemer for his people, before he left the earth, was, “Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me *be with me where I am*, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.”

Our sweetest enjoyments on earth are mingled with griefs; even when

we take our places at the communion-table, we may find enough in ourselves and in others to mar our comfort; but it will not be so in heaven. There our cup of joy will not have a single ingredient of sorrow. Nothing will ever disturb the tranquillity of our spirits or interrupt for a moment our song of praise; for "the Lamb shall lead us to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes."

Shall it be my happiness to join the ransomed throng? I take my place here at the sacramental Supper: shall I be a welcome guest at the marriage-supper of the Lamb? Have I on the wedding-garment? Is it now my delight to hold communion with the Redeemer and with his people? Then have I already the foretaste of future bliss, and my God, who thus visits me

here, will not fail to own me in the day when he makes up his jewels.

Rise, then, my soul, above this shadowy world, and aspire with holy ardor after the glory soon to be revealed. Gird up thy loins and be sober, and hope unto the end. Let my lamp ever be trimmed and burning, that when the summons is given, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh! Go ye forth to meet him," I may welcome his advent and enter into the joy of my Lord.

XVIII.

THE INVITATION.

As it is probable that this little volume will come into the hands of some who are not communicants, I cannot bring it to a close without an affectionate and earnest appeal in reference to a neglected but most important duty.

The feast of love is prepared and the kind invitation has gone forth: "Come, for all things are now ready;" but what numbers still refuse to come, and perish notwithstanding the ample provision made for their salvation! "All, with one consent, make excuse." They slight the offers of divine mercy and live in persevering disobedience to one of the most reasonable commands addressed

to man: "Do this in remembrance of me." Should the reader be among that unhappy number, permit me, in all kindness, to ask, "Why are you not a communicant?"

You reply,

"I am not fit to be one."

But what do you suppose is the fitness requisite? Is it not sincere love to Christ, contrition for sin, acquiescence in God's plan of redeeming mercy, and a fixed purpose to walk in all his ordinances and all his commandments? Do you possess these marks of grace? Then come and welcome. It is for you the festal board is spread, and no sense of unworthiness need bar you from it.

"But I do not find myself in possession of these marks."

This is indeed a sad confession, and one which must produce the deepest

humiliation. It implies that you are in a state of hostility to the Being who, of all others, has the highest claim on your regard; it implies that sin, the worst of all evils, occasions you no grief; it implies that you are utterly unfit to have fellowship with the Saviour and with his people; it implies that you have no part nor lot in the redemption of the gospel; it implies that you are unfit to die, unfit for the judgment, unfit for heaven. What a confession is this! What aggravated guilt does it involve, and what earnest solicitude should it excite for a way of escape from a condition so deplorable!

Another pleads:

“I do not regard a participation in the Lord’s Supper as essential. I can be a Christian, and yet not a communicant.”

To this I reply:

I am far from maintaining that the ordinance possesses any saving efficacy. It is possible to eat and to drink in the presence of Christ at his Table, and yet to be at last disowned by him. Nor do I maintain that no one, under any circumstances, can be saved who is not a communicant. But I insist that the celebration of the Supper is a duty incumbent on every Christian, the willful and persevering neglect of which must, like the neglect of any other duty, militate against evidences of piety. "Then," says the Psalmist, "shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments." What evidence can we have that we are the friends of Christ while we disregard a command so reasonable in its nature, so benevolent in its design and so easy in its observance?

Again I ask,

“Why are you not a communicant?”

“I have been thinking,” you say, “seriously about the matter. I sometimes trust that I am a Christian, but I want clearer evidence before I make a public profession of my faith in Christ.”

Whence do your doubts arise? Are they produced by a consciousness that you have not wholly given yourself to the Lord, or by a sense of remaining imperfections? If by the latter, they may furnish no reason why you should not avail yourself of the privileges of the communion. It is not the strength of your faith, but its reality; not the ardor of your love, but its sincerity; not the depth of your contrition, but its genuineness,—by which your Christian character and your fitness for the Lord’s Table are to be determined. You may be assured that the neglect of a known duty will not relieve you

of your perplexities. Take up your cross, and grace will enable you to bear it. Let neither shame nor fear prevent you from testifying to the world your solemn purpose to live for God and for his cause.

Another plea which is often urged is this:

“I am about as good as many church-members.”

What if we admit the fact? Will the sins of others afford any excuse for your own? Must not every one give an account of himself to God? It is indeed a matter of deep regret that any should “profess to know God, while in his works they deny him.” But if some professed Christians bring a reproach upon the holy cause they have espoused, are there not numbers who honor it? Have there not always been witnesses for God, the lights of the

world, the salt of the earth? Among the twelve apostles there was a Judas: did the rest forsake the Saviour because one betrayed him? Did Paul refrain from preaching the gospel because some preached it through strife and envy? Let the misconduct of false professors operate as a warning, but let it never be urged as an excuse for the neglect of duty.

“But I fear that should I make an open profession of love to Christ, I may fall away, and bring a scandal on his name.”

Have you no fear of dishonoring him by your neglect? Is not your present position one directly hostile to the interests of his kingdom? Does not your conduct declare to the world that he is unworthy of your regard, and encourage others to treat him as he is treated by you? You fear that

you may not hold out, and who would do so were he not sustained by an almighty Hand? "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe," cried an ancient saint. The same grace that has proved sufficient for others will prove sufficient for you.

The reader may plead,

"I am too young to make a profession and partake of the communion."

Age has nothing to do with the matter, provided there exist the necessary spiritual qualifications. If you have knowledge sufficient to "discern the Lord's body"—to understand the nature and design of the Lord's Supper; if you place your trust for salvation solely in Jesus and mean to walk in the way of his commandments,—then the younger you are, the more cordially will you be welcomed: "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early

shall find me." That was a touching reply of a Chinese boy when he requested baptism and was told that, in consequence of his youth, he might fall back if he made a profession: "Jesus has promised to carry the lambs in his arms. As I am only a little boy, it will be easier for him to carry me." The argument was irresistible. Both he and his aged father were baptized. The Rev. Mr. Spurgeon says that while in a year he receives into his church about forty children and excommunicates about two adults, he has never had occasion to excommunicate a child.

"I freely admit," you say, "that it is my duty to commemorate the Saviour's death, and I hope it will not be long before I shall be prepared to discharge the duty."

Alas, how many who have formed this purpose have never fulfilled it! One communion season has succeeded

another, and still the duty has been delayed. The preparation has not been made, the convenient time has not come, or death has been commissioned to close for ever the day of grace and the precious opportunity of paying the debt of gratitude due to the Redeemer. It is said that one of the Presidents of the United States intended, had his life been spared, to make a public profession of his faith on the Sabbath which followed his decease. Death came too soon; and so, dear reader, may he too soon come to you. You know not that you will have to-morrow.

How unreasonable are all the excuses urged for the neglect of so plain a duty! They do not satisfy your conscience now, and how, think you, will they appear in the hour of death? You would not venture to present them to God now; what hope, then, can you

have that they will be sustained in the final judgment?

Dwell, dear reader, on the claims that Christ has on your love and your obedience. Think of the toil and the suffering he endured for you, and say if you owe nothing in return for such unmerited kindness.

“For *me*? Did Jesus suffer for *me*?”

Yes for *thee*—for *thy* transgressions, for *thy* crimes. Long ere you had an existence he called you by name and poured forth his blood for your redemption. Oh, pierce not that heart anew by your ingratitude! Drop for ever that spear at the foot of his cross, and surrender yourself to the power of his love!

Reflect, too, on the tender solicitude of Christian friends for your spiritual welfare. If there is anything that can mar their enjoyment at the communion-

table, it is the thought that so many still slight a Saviour's love and remain as mere spectators of a scene in which they have such a deep personal interest.

What a separation do we often see in families on sacramental occasions!—husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, divided by a line placing one portion in the fold of Christ and the other in the ranks of his foes! Shall this separation be for ever? Shall those who are united by such tender ties part to meet no more? Why should not all be joined in holy fellowship here, and be at last prepared to sit together around the marriage-supper of the Lamb?



